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ABSTRACT

A set of propositions surrounding the gender issue within organizations is identified in this paper along with research propositions which have implications for future research. The paper's major thesis is that career development is best understood when work attitudes and behaviors are related to overall evaluation systems which result in organizational outcomes such as salary administration and upward mobility. First, a review of recent research on female professionals is assembled to illustrate propositions emerging from: recent studies on work attitudes and behaviors; evaluations of attitudes and behaviors by self, peers, supervisors, and subordinates; and general organizational outcomes relating to promotional progress. Hypotheses resulting from the intersections of these three major research areas are then presented to suggest a direction for future research. The paper concludes by noting that, in order to compare male and female experiences within organizations, the context of research on female professionals must be broadened both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, it is asserted that only when the variables which influence reactions to gender are better understood will it become easier to predict outcomes based on behaviors and evaluations. Seventeen pages of notes and references are appended. (AEW)

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Female Professionals' Organizational Behaviors, Evaluations and Outcomes: Implications for Future Research

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to propose a set of propositions surrounding the gender issue within organizations and to propose research propositions which have implications for future research. Specifically, we propose that career development is best understood when work attitudes and behaviors are related to overall evaluation systems which result in organizational outcomes such as salary administration and vertical mobility. A review of recent research on female professionals has been assembled to illustrate propositions emerging from recent studies on work attitudes and behaviors; evaluations of attitudes and behaviors by self, peers, supervisors, and subordinates; and general organizational outcomes relating to promotional progress. Finally, resulting propositions from the intersections of these three major research areas are presented to suggest a direction for future research.

Female Professionals' Organizational Behaviors Evaluations and Outcomes: Implications for Future Research

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Female Professionals' Organizational Behaviors, Evaluations and Outcomes: Implications for Future Research

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Female Professionals' Organizational Behaviors, Evaluations and Outcomes: Implications for Future Research

Along with increased female participation in the labor force has come an active interest in how that participation compares both qualitatively and quantitatively to that of males. The literature abounds with studies of male/female leadership characteristics, communication styles, performance comparisons and numerous other aspects of work experiences. Additionally, a growing body of research is comparing for males and females such critical organizational outcomes as vertical mobility rates, income differentials, integration of non-traditional jobs and other predictors of promotional progress. While important contributions to understanding the gender issue as it affects the work experience, these studies generally do not attempt to relate male and female attitudes toward work, work behaviors, and overall performance evaluations to the key organizational outcome of promotional progress. The purpose of this work is to propose a set of propositions surrounding the gender issue within organizations and to propose research propositions which have implications for future research. Specifically, we propose that career development is best understood when work attitudes and behaviors are related to overall evaluation systems which result in organizational outcomes such as salary administration and vertical mobility. A review of recent research on female professionals has been assembled to illustrate propositions emerging from recent studies on work attitudes and behaviors; evaluations of attitudes and behaviors by self, peers, supervisors, and subordinates; and general organizational outcomes relating to promotional

progress. Finally, resulting propositions from the intersections of these three major research areas are presented to suggest a direction for future research.

Proposition 1: Although subtle differences exist, male and female professionals exhibit predominently similar attitudes, styles and behaviors in the work setting.

Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from the plethora of research comparing professional males and females is the number of studies which note a lack of significant differences in both attitudes toward work and actual leadership behaviors. For example, Day and Stogdill found male and female supervisors who occupied parallel positions and performed similar functions to exhibit similar patterns of leader behavior and levels of effectiveness.[1] Similarly, Osborn and Vicars, in their data from two organizations, found no consistent effect of leader sex on leader behavior or on subordinate satisfaction.[2] Additionally, women have been reported as being similar to men in problem solving, cooperation and competition, and potential management capability.[3] Bartol, in a comprehensive review of the literature on leadership, indicated little difference in female and male leaders' styles of leadership, levels of job satisfaction, or group output.[4] In fact, in a large-scale, multifaceted study of nearly 2000 male and female managers' managerial philosophy, motivation to work, participative practices, interpersonal competence, and management style, Donnell and Hall found only two overall differences: Female managers' work motivation profiles were more achieving and male

managers were more open and candid with their colleagues.[5] According to Miner, "women appear to manage well for essentially the same reasons men do--that is, existing criteria for excellence are equally appropriate for both (p. 148)."[6]

Similarities between males and females extend beyond the leadership paradigm. In the area of communicator style Montgomery and Norton reported no consistent differences in predictor variables for an effective communicator although males reported a more precise communication style than females with females more animated than males.[7] Additionally Fisher, in an attempt to determine the differential impact of sexual composition and competitive or cooperative orientation on interaction patterns in same-sex and mixed-sex dyads, reported that competitive/cooperative orientation but not sexual composition of the dyads exerted a significant impact on the content and relationship patterns of interaction.[8] In related research, Shockley and Shockley-Zalabak and Morley found no significant differences in the preferences for conflict styles reported by male and female professionals.[9] Likewise, Birdsall found that female and male managers used similar communication styles during staff meetings.[10] Additionally, Lovrich and Jones reported no differences between male and female administrators' willingness to conduct the performance appraisal process.[11]

Research profiling the successful woman manager also underscores the considerable similarities and subtle differences between male and female professionals. For example, Brown reported that almost all successful female managers are pleased with their work, enjoy successes, and hold the

same expectations of their positions as male managers.[12] They gain satisfaction from solving problems, using their talents, and managing other people.[13] Finally, in a recent University of Texas study, more than 50 female leaders reported they were cooperative rather than competitive with co-workers and tended to see themselves as more independent, resourceful, self-reliant, responsible, achievement-oriented, and self-confident than other women.[14] In comparison with male counterparts, the female leaders profiled themselves as more intuitive, compassionate and empathetic and less inclined to use power.

EVALUATIONS: SELF, PEERS, SUPERVISORS, SUBORDINATES

Proposition 2: Gender operates as an inconsistent variable in self, peer, supervisor and subordinate evaluations of male and female professionals.

Despite the growing body of literature demonstrating few behavioral differences between male and female professionals, the most important factor in determining the selection of potential managers and leaders may not be actual or even perceived behavior, but rather, how behavior is evaluated.[15] In fact, "reports of no differences . . . may have little to do with the attitudinal and practical difficulties women face."[16]

The literature on bias in evaluating male versus female performance is mixed. Some studies show no differences, some studies show that males are evaluated more favorably than females, and some studies show that females are evaluated more favorably than males.[17]

Nieva and Gutek suggest that a potential barrier to women at work is prejudicial evaluation of females' qualifications and performance.[18] They note that while employee evaluation should be objectively based on

merit, extensive documentation exists of deviation from these ideals. Glucklich and Povall studied 26 organizations and found that in 22 of the 26, one or more managers concerned with hiring, training, and promotions said they "were discriminating or intending to discriminate against men or women in the future"[19]. Women are more likely to be subjected to negative bias in evaluation when the required level of inference is high, when sex-role incongruence occurs, or when women are highly competent.[20]

Inconsistencies in Self Evaluation

When female professionals evaluate their own performance in organizations, results are also mixed. Snyder and Bruning, for example, surveyed both supervisors and nonsupervisors and found that women reported themselves to be as competent as their male counterparts.[21] These results stand in contrast to a study by Deaux in which women managers' self-ratings were lower than those of their male colleagues.[22] Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman, asked 304 male managers and 271 female managers to complete questionnaires with scales measuring self-perceptions of ability, motivation, and environment, or the extent to which the individual receives feedback from and copes effectively with the work environment.[23] In terms of overall results, female managers reported greater competence-motivation and competence-environment, but less competence-ability than male managers.

Inconsistencies in Peer Evaluation

When the performance of female professionals is evaluated by their peers, both male and female, the existence of sex-role conditioning in the work place becomes evident. Wood found that males reported anxiety about restructuring relationships with females who were once subordinates but

have become peers.[24] Haefner, in surveying workers in two Illinois towns, found a clear preference for working with highly competent men over highly competent women.[25] Donnell and Hall found that female managers are not as willing as male managers to share information with their colleagues--"confirming evidence of interpersonal noise at the peer level".[26] In a more recent study, however, Tsui and Gutek (1984) found that female managers were given higher performance evaluations by peers than were their male counterparts.

When research on women professionals examines peer evaluations in terms of the sex-composition of the peer groups--female-female or female-male--findings are often negative. Matteson, for example, found fewer positive attitudes toward women managers among male managers.[27] Furthermore, attitudes toward women managers became less favorable for both males and females with increased work experience. Albrecht reported that female scientists are usually not sought out by their male colleagues, nor do these women seek out their male colleagues.[28] Wood surveyed 100 male managers who identified two critical faults of female managers: Females tend to be overdemanding, particularly of other females, and they are unwilling to provide help to other females.[29] While some research reports findings to the contrary, Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman, in a survey of 575 male and female managers, found that females believed other female managers were less competent than males in similar positions.[30]

Inconsistencies in Subordinate Evaluation

Despite difficulties such as these in negotiating new roles for professional women in organizations, some researchers identify a growing

body of empirical literature providing evidence that women are experiencing managerial success.[31] Indeed, although management has traditionally been a male dominated occupation, increasing evidence indicates that females can be as successful as males.[32] On the other hand, research which is now several decades old indicated definite bias against female supervisors. Ellman, for example, found that 81% of queried personnel executives agreed that men generally object to female supervisors; 51% of the sample believed that females object to female supervisors as well.[33] More recently, however, Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman found that subordinates who have experienced working under female managers have more positive perceptions of female managers' motivation to perform effectively.[34] Petty, et al, found no differences among subordinates' job satisfaction levels due to supervisor sex.[35]

While job satisfaction of subordinates has been investigated frequently as an evaluation measure for male and female superiors, researchers have investigated other issues as well. Donnell and Hall, for example, administered the Management Relations Survey (MRS) to 428 subordinates of 185 female managers and 504 subordinates of 185 male managers.[36] In the first section of the MRS, subordinates assess the communication practices of their managers; in the second section, subordinates assess their own use of interpersonal communication with their managers. Subordinates reported no differences between the communication behaviors of male and female managers; however, subordinates of female managers reported that they generally solicited less feedback from their managers than did subordinates of male managers. Wexley and Pulakos, in a sample of 286 manager-subordinate dyads, found that the more

cognizant a subordinate is of his or her manager's work-related attitudes, the more favorably the subordinate appraises the manager's leadership performance.[37] These results, however, occurred more reliably in same-sex, as opposed to mixed-sex, dyads.

Other researchers have investigated basic dimensions of leadership behavior: "consideration", or warm, trusting, friendly behaviors, and "initiating structure", or behaviors which include overt attempts to organize group activities and achieve organizational goals.[38] Research generally shows that superiors are rated more highly when they score highly in both dimensions; however, some studies suggest that both males and females prefer male superiors who exhibit more "initiating structure" behaviors and female superiors who exhibit more "consideration" behaviors.[39]

Results have sometimes indicated that successful female leadership performance is evaluated more highly than similar performance by males. Jacobson and Effertz found that group members rated female leadership more highly than they rated male leadership.[40] They explain their findings by citing Samuel Johnson's remark on women preachers in the eighteenth century: "Sir, a woman preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well: but you are very surprised to find it done at all." Abramson, Goldberg, Greenberg and Abramson have referred to similar findings as the "talking platypus phenomenon".[41] It should be pointed out, however, that these studies were not carried out in organizational settings.

Inconsistencies in Supervisor Evaluations

Research has also asked the question: How are female professionals evaluated as subordinates? Again, results are mixed. Evaluators are constrained by their judgments, values, and perceptions of role behaviors. If evaluators' perceptions of the female role are not compatible with their perceptions of the managerial role, these conflicting sets of role expectations may affect evaluations of performance.[42] Schein cautions that stereotyped thinking by superiors about a woman's capability to function effectively as a manager may limit her ability to perform well and to be promoted.[43] If a superior perceives that a woman is less aggressive, competitive, or forceful than her male counterpart, her superior may not require of the woman tasks which utilize such skills. This, in turn, may limit the female professional, keep her from developing these abilities, promote within the organization an image that she cannot perform these tasks, and thereby restrict her promotional progress.

Along these lines, Kiesler identified a cognitive bias which occurs during the evaluation process: "actuarial prejudice," an expectation of inferior performance from subgroup members based on available information about the group.[44] It may be the case that since there are fewer successful women than men in organizations, evaluators will expect all females to be less successful; therefore, these expectations will surface in performance evaluations. Patterson, in a study of 192 male and female managers, found that females were consistently rated lower than males on evaluations of promotability and performance.[45] Moses and Boehm, on the other hand, found no sex differences in the potential ratings of 4,846

female managers and 8,885 male managers.[46] Hall and Hall found no sex differences in ratings of job incumbents' ability, motivation, or overall task performance.[47] Likewise, Deaux found no differences in the performance ratings given to female and male managers by superiors and Mobley found similar results.[48] Furthermore, Schwartz found that 95% of employers of women managers rated their performance on the job as excellent, very good, or good. Wood, in polling nearly 100 male and female managers, discovered that most managers believe women are proving their competence and winning increased acceptance in organizations.[49]

Of particular interest regarding evaluation of subordinates by superiors is the amount of mutual agreement between the two. Research demonstrates that the perceptions of subordinates and superiors can differ significantly.[50] Staley and Shockley-Zalabak, for example, reported little agreement between female professionals and their superiors on their assessed communication competencies.[51] In assessments of 15 areas of communication proficiency, a woman and her supervisor agreed only on the woman's proficiency in the areas of business writing, oral presentations, and communications technology--visible, overt skill sets. The authors suggest that the significance of their findings does not lie in the areas of agreement between female professionals and their supervisors. Rather, the lack of agreement in areas of critically complex competencies such as group decision-making, interpersonal relationships, motivating people, and delegating authority may be key to understanding the managerial development of female professionals and their subsequent promotional progress.

Proposition 3: Successful performance of female professionals, as opposed to males, is more likely to be attributed to external, unstable explanations rather than ability.

Discrepancies in research findings may also be explained through an understanding of the evaluation process, which includes not only a judgment about the worth of performance but also an attribution of causality: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck.[52] These four causal explanations for the quality of performance may be characterized as internal or external and as either stable or unstable. Performance is seen to be maximally predictable and repeatable if causality is both internal and stable; only ability fulfills both conditions. Because of sex-role stereotyping, however, a woman's successful performance is often attributed to effort, task ease, or luck, as opposed to ability.[53] Unexpected success, such as high task performance by women, may be attributed to extra effort and therefore worthy of higher praise than similar performance by males.[54] Heilman and Guzzo, however, found fewer and less desirable organizational rewards associated with causal explanations for females.[55] Promotion was seen as an appropriate reward for ability, while pay raises were seen as an appropriate reward for success due to effort.

CAREER OUTCOMES

Proposition 4: Female professionals, as opposed to males, make less money, occupy lower level management positions, are clustered in stereotypical occupations, and experience less vertical mobility.

Although preferences for behavior and actual behaviors of males and female professionals appear similar, evaluations of that behavior are complex and often contradictory. In viewing evaluation of behavior as key to eventual promotional progress, the issue becomes one of not only

understanding the evaluation process but of understanding how that process contributes to organizational outcomes--specifically promotional progress. Unfortunately little research directly addresses this critical area.

The U. S. Labor Department tells us that women are in the work force in record numbers--some 48.5 million in 1983.[56] Women in fact have accounted for more than three-fifths of the increase in the civilian labor force in the past decade and constitute 44 percent of all persons in the civilian labor force. Women continue to occupy traditionally "female" occupations such as clerical and retail sales positions although 32 percent of today's managers and administrators are female. The Labor Department also reports many women are choosing to work for themselves with females now owning 26 percent of all U. S. non-farm sole proprietorships. Employment of women scientists and engineers increased by over 200 percent between 1972 and 1982, compared with about 40 percent for men. Annual salaries for women scientists and engineers during that period averaged 80 percent of their male counterparts' salaries (National Science Foundation).[57]

Demographics alone, however, do not explain promotional progress for females. In 1972, Day and Stogdill reported that similar behaviors by males and females led to different career paths.[58] Specifically, for males, rapid advancement tended to go to those who were more effective and who had more influence--for females, however, rate of advancement was not related to effectiveness. A study conducted by Levitin, Quinn, and Staines for the University of Michigan Research Center equated six salary factors for males and females: education, tenure with employer, tenure on

specific job, hours worked per week, amount of supervisory responsibility, and occupation level.[59] Data from 375 female and 695 male subjects indicated that 94.9 percent of all females at all job levels were underpaid compared to men with the same jobs, education, and experience. Reported in Fortune in 1984, Devanna matched 1969 to 1972 business school graduates (45 men and 45 women) with similar backgrounds, credentials, and marital status.[60] The starting salaries for the women were 98% of their male counterparts. Collecting promotional progress data on the same subjects in 1980, Devanna found large salary differences: in manufacturing women earned $41,818 compared to $59,733 for men; in finance $42,867 vs. $46,786; in service industries $36,666 vs. $38,600. Devanna reported no major differences between men and women in work motivation, types of industries chosen, time away from careers for family reasons, initial or later job functions. Devanna concluded from her research that discrimination remains a powerful factor in overall promotional progress for females. Athanassiades reported that subordinates of both sexes were clearly aware of the existence of job-discrimination against women.[61] Additionally, his findings reported women in managerial positions feel more suppressed and less autonomous than their male counterparts.

On a more positive note, Wood found that neither male nor female managers in 14 Los Angeles companies felt that significant personal or organizational adjustments had been necessary during a period when many women had entered managerial ranks.[62] Over half the sample said that they had not observed any noticeable effect on the overall operations. Likewise, Tsui and Gutek, in a field investigation, found no pro-male bias in middle management. Additionally they report women managers

experiencing a fast promotion rate and more satisfaction with jobs than their male counterparts.[63]

Although not comprehensive and as yet somewhat unevenly documented, the weight of current evidence suggests female professionals continue to experience distinctly different career paths from their male counterparts. Specifically female professionals are more likely to remain individual contributors versus managers, experience salary differentials which increase over the length of their careers, and find themselves clustered in traditionally female occupations. In general, females remain an underutilized yet growing segment of the labor force.

IMPLICATIONS FROM RECENT RESEARCH

The research presented in this review demonstrates few sex-related behavioral differences yet varied patterns of evaluation and differential career outcomes for males and females.

Much of the behavioral research can be characterized by comparisons of measurements on individual characteristics. While this perspective has provided necessary groundwork, it is insufficient to explain complex career processes. For this reason, future researchers should consider the critical issues embedded in the following research propositions.

Research Proposition 1: Similar attitudes, studies, and behaviors of male and female professionals frequently do not result in similar evaluations or organizational outcomes.

In looking at behaviors, evaluations, and outcomes as an organizational process, it becomes apparent that similar behaviors for males and females, in and of themselves, do not predict similarity in

career advancement. The evaluation component remains an unpredictable influence on females' careers.

Inconsistency in the evaluation research calls into question the underlying assumption in much of the behavioral research, that similar behaviors for males and females lead to similar organizational outcomes for both sexes. The mixed evaluation findings also raise important issues about variables other than performance which contribute to career advancement. Attitudes of evaluators, formal evaluation systems, position levels, organizational culture and type are but a few variables embedded in current evaluation research which have not been systematically examined for their effect.

Research Proposition 2: Causal explanations of female career success which are based on factors other than ability contribute to inconsistency in female professionals' promotional progress.

The need for new directions in research on female professionals is underscored by the inability of current research to adequately explain the influence of gender on promotional progress. The research on successful female professionals, for example, thoughtfully profiles characteristics and styles of these women but does not take into account evaluation processes operating throughout their careers or other important aspects of organizational context. Additionally, little is known about predictors of male promotional progress in organizations where women have been successful.

Research Proposition 3: Sex bias in performance evaluation is more likely at entry-professional than in mid- or upper-level positions.

Although profiles of successful women are available in the literature, less is known about either males or females who do not achieve high levels of professional, managerial, or leadership success. Since most females who are managers and supervisors are in first line positions rather than mid- or top-management, it may be fundamentally important to understand how gender relates to evaluations and career progress at the entry supervisor level.

Research Proposition 4: Attitudes of evaluators, evaluation systems, position levels, and organizational culture and type influence evaluators' responses to sex of professionals.

Research Proposition 5: Organizations where females are vertically distributed comparably to their male counterparts evaluate performance differently from organizations where this distribution has not occurred.

In viewing behaviors, evaluations, and outcomes as key to promotional process, we need to identify key contextual variables which influence this process. Too little is known about the influence of culture, affirmative action, type of organization and job function as they relate to appropriate behaviors and subsequent evaluations of behavior. Specifically organizations where vertical distributions of females have occurred should be compared with others where this distribution is lacking.

In order to compare male and female experiences within organizations, we must broaden the context of research on female professionals--both quantitatively and qualitatively. Only when the variables which influence reactions to gender are better understood will our ability to predict outcomes based on behaviors and evaluations substantially improve.

FOOTNOTES

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